

Isaiah 53:10-12

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

October 24, 2021

Magicians are amazing entertainment. Their feats, which are properly called tricks, follow years of practice so that the hand is faster than the eye. They pull quarters out from behind someone's ears, the classic rabbit out of a hat, a bouquet of flowers from a sleeve, or saw someone in half. We know it can't happen as portrayed so watch closely but still are unable to figure it out. It's not what it seems.

There's no magician in the text, but the prophecy mixes suffering and glory. Those experiences seem to be opposites. We examine them more closely and agree.

IT'S NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

- I. The suffering of Jesus
- II. Was the way to glory

The prophet declared that the suffering of Jesus was the Lord's will. This chapter of Isaiah is familiar, perhaps his most well-known, often heard during Lent or on Good Friday. The verses before us conclude the chapter with a summary. It tells of the suffering servant who was "oppressed and afflicted," brought "as a lamb to the slaughter." Here we note he was crushed, beat to pieces. The suffering one was not the nation of Israel, although the prophet had warned of defeat for them. He refers to an individual, but no mere human would be able to do what he describes. These words foretell of the Savior, God's own Son.

"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer." God knows everything, including the future. He was aware what the crown of his creation, the human race, would do, and that was to ruin everything by sinning. He was not willing to obliterate us as he had every right to do. So he formed a plan already in eternity to solve the problem. It involved offering his own Son in payment for our sins. As a parent I can't imagine doing so. But our gracious heavenly Father did. He sent Jesus to suffer horribly.

God did it because of our sins. There were several expressions in these verses that made the point. The sufferer was called a guilt offering. That was a sacrifice for sins that required retribution or payment. There were iniquities. The picture there is a brick or stone wall. A mason wants his product to be even, smooth and straight. He may run a plumb line along it. The plumb line of God's law shows anything but evenness in our lives. There are parts jutting out, others sunk in, gaps

in places and the whole wall is crooked. There was reference to transgressors. The limits are clearly marked, telling us to go no further, like a no trespassing sign at the boundary of a property. We come up to that line and don't even hesitate but recklessly cross the line into doing wrong. That's transgressing. The general term "sin" shows rebellion against God and his ways.

However, Isaiah wasn't giving us a vocabulary lesson. He was pointing out the guilt of you and me. Our ways of disobeying God are endless. We come into this world with original sin; we were born with the condition of guilt inherited from our parents that renders us beat from the start and unable to do right. So we live in open and bold defiance to the Lord and his ways. We commit what the commandments specifically name: idolatry, disobedience to parents, murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, coveting. We are guilty of sinful actions leading up to those gross outbursts of evil: hurting and harming others, mean or foul speech. We also are impure where sin starts, in the heart with hatred, lust, envy and greed. We place self above God. We have not just done bad things but there is the good that we have failed to do, such as remaining silent when a reputation is trashed or the Lord is mocked. We have ignored a person's need when we had the time and means to help but didn't spend a moment or lift a finger to do anything. We have sins that we keep hidden as we strive to maintain an upstanding exterior but are evil within. There are even sins that we don't realize because we are ignorant of God's law or the action is so ingrained in us that we are unaware of doing it. The load we have piled up was taken by the suffering servant, the Lord Jesus.

He did it by entering our human existence. He was sinless since he was not the product of two mortals but was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. He faced temptations like we have and defeated them.

Although he was personally innocent, he gathered that mountain of sin from each and every one of us. Then he went to the cross to pay for them. Our minds cringe at the physical horrors he endured in being whipped and in hanging there suspended on that wood. We feel heartache at his betrayal by one of his own, abandonment by nearly all of his disciples during his hours of suffering and by the mockery he endured from enemies, soldiers, passersby and even the men crucified that same day beside him. There was worse, "the suffering of his soul," which Isaiah mentioned. He experienced the agony of hell, of countless hells, as the sins of all people were upon him, and it was all compressed into those hours he hung on the cross. He was forsaken by his own heavenly Father as the hideousness of our sin covered him. Finally, he met death.

Because Jesus was true God he could endure it all. It was his purpose in being here on this earth, as he stated in today's Gospel reading, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The account of Jesus' suffering and death, whether here in Isaiah by prophecy or in its fulfillment in the four Gospels of the New Testament, is not just an interesting, tragic story. Along with Isaiah I have been saying "our" and "we" in speaking of sin and guilt. You and I are in this text. We are the ones he cared enough for to do it. Our sins sat on his shoulders and caused him to cry out in pain. It's not what it seems, that he was the guilty one being punished. No, he was there in our place.

II.

It's not what it seems because of what he accomplished. Suffering and dying looks like shame and defeat but the suffering of Jesus was the way to glory. It brought glory to him. The prophet noted that "the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand." The Savior succeeded in his mission. He paid the price in full. That is an easy statement to make but it is mind-boggling in its effect. Jesus declared at the end of his time on the cross, "It is finished." He had completed his assigned mission and committed his spirit to his Father's care as he entered death.

His success was demonstrated on Easter morning when he rose from death. It was also reflected here in Isaiah 53 with phrases such as, "He will see his offspring and prolong his days," "He will see the light of life and be satisfied," and "he will divide the spoils with the strong." Those descriptions all show continuing life and activity. Jesus lives and rules in glory over his Church. His offspring are believers. He later ascended to the right hand of his Father in heaven. So James and John were correct in talking about glory after a prediction of his suffering and death in the reading from Mark.

There was also glory in store for us. "By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many." "Justify" is a noteworthy term as we approach next Sunday's celebration of the Lutheran Reformation. It was the key doctrine at stake. "Justify" is a court term. It means to be pronounced not guilty. We go free. It is not our doing but his. It happens "by his knowledge," reads the translation, but better would be, "by knowledge of him." Knowing what Jesus has done and suffered for you, trust him as your Savior, have the forgiveness he won for all your sins and have his promise of heaven. He won it for "many," for multitudes, masses of people. He made the payment for all. The benefits are enjoyed by believers.

We belong to him. We are the spoils, what the victor takes possession of. We are his people, the Christian Church. We live under his care and protection. We are at peace, no longer afraid of God since the sins are gone from our record. We will be blessed forever in his glorious home.

We also enjoy his continuing care. Isaiah mentioned his making "intercession for the transgressors." That is another function of his work as our great High Priest. Our earthly life has not ended. As long as we dwell here we still sin daily. Satan, that dirty player who entices us to sin, then turns on us and accuses us before God. Jesus points to the payment he already made for those sins. He speaks up in our behalf.

Because of his work for us, we give him glory. We thank and praise him. How could we hold back when we know what we deserved but what we instead have? Our praise is more than oohing and aahing. We worship regularly in his house. We witness openly and boldly, giving him credit for all he has done and continues to do for us. We live in his ways, obeying his commands, serving him, following him in faith. Recognize what he means to you: everything!

Jesus showed that the way to greatness and glory is in serving. James and John wanted a shortcut to it. They wanted special positions of honor and privilege when Jesus entered his glory. Seeing what we all have, do we need anything more? We have glory because he didn't take any shortcut. He endured all. Follow him in faith, even when it means suffering for you.

It may seem contrary to logic and contrary to our senses when we view the suffering servant in Isaiah's prophecy. But it worked. It was God's way. It is not what it seems, but he did it. You are saved. Rejoice, enjoy your status as a forgiven child of God, give thanks to your Savior and share the good news!